



We have through a kind Providence been brought together in safety, at the appointed place and time, and having obtained help of God, we continue to this day. May the *sentiments* of gratitude fill every heart, and the *language* of gratitude employ every tongue, (*viz.*) I am unspeakably obliged, what returns shall I make? Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord!

We have again been favoured with one of the greatest privileges out of heaven; that of having, as we trust, holy intercourse with the Lord. Having him to speak to us, by his word, and spirit; and ourselves permitted to speak to him, in prayer, and praise. Lord how delightful 'tis to see, a whole assembly worship thee; at once they sing at once they pray, they hear of heaven and learn the way.

We have received, and as we hope in some measure felt, your affectionate Letters, addressed to us; containing your checkered experience in past time, and your mingled hopes and fears as to time to come. Your tribulations from the world, and your peace from Christ. The Christian pilgrim in his way to mount Zion above, must expect to travel through vales of tears, as well as on the delectable mountains of holy joy—We thank you for your prayers, and we hope they have been answered in our religious enjoyments.

Some of your Letters inform us of considerable additions this year; and others speak of removals without additions. We hope that those churches to which additions have been made, will acknowledge with thankfulness the power and benefit of divine influences, in the conversion of lost sinners among them; and consider it as an encouragement to persevere in the use of the stated means of grace. We should both lay by the pool, and look for the angel.

Where no additions have been made, we hope the members of such churches will rejoice in the prosperity of others, as the glory of God, in the salvation of souls, is the great end of all worship wherever it is performed.

Where Churches have had no increase of their numbers, it behoves the members notwithstanding, to be resigned to the will of the allwise and sovereign Disposer of all events, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; but it also becomes them to enquire whether any antisciptural errors have been imbibed, or gross immoralities connived at, as the Achan in the camp, which hath provoked the





the Lord to withhold his blessing. If upon examination these errors in doctrine or practice are discovered, reformation should be resolved on; and a revival of all neglected religion earnestly requested of him, who alone can succeed his own appointments. When the Lord hideth his face we ought to be troubled.

Where churches and ministers are reunited after some absence from each other, we recommended a total oblivion of the former occasions of difference; and watchfulness against the returns of those sources of uneasiness. Persons who are going to a world of everlasting peace and love, should take care that they fall not out by the way.—Peace-makers are called the children of God, but peace breakers may be called the children of the wicked one.

The Lord, in whose hand is our breath, has this year removed various useful persons from our churches by death, particularly the valuable yoke-fellow of our dear brother, with whose church we are now assembled. He gave them to us, and he had an undoubted right to take them away from us. And while we lament the churches loss in their removals, we wish to think with pleasure of the happy exchange which our deceased christian friends have made, in leaving this world of sin and sorrow, for another of holiness and joy; for as is said in a recent publication, of departed saints,

“Such are not lost, but gone before,

Where sin and sorrow are no more.”

May we be followers of them, who through faith and patience, are gone to inherit the promises; and may Zion's King prepare and incline others honourably to fill up their vacant seats in his church!

Some others have been removed from the churches by excommunication; who, having ceased to watch and pray against temptation, have learnt by painful experience the truth of Mr. Gurnal's observation, that “Satan lets down sinners, to the lowest depths of sin, by winding stairs; whereby they can see but the next step; whereas, were they to see from top to the bottom at once, he fears, they might be frightened back from descending the horrid gulph with him.”

"O how much better were it," says one, "for a man to put himself to shame at the bar of his own conscience, and blush in his closet, before the all-seeing God; than neglect this duty, till some bold temptation, coinciding with some sordid and ungovernable passion, puts him to shame before the world!"

"When Peter thought thereon he wept,  
Smote by that eye that looks on me,  
That looks on all."—

May the compassionate Saviour of the chief of sinners, turn and look repentance into these unhappy persons; and then say to each of them "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

In our letter to you this year, we can inform you of no divine truth, or christian duty, than what our past letters contain; nor can we urge your regard to the truth or duty by any better motives, than what have been often mentioned in our former addresses to you. In our last year's letter you were reminded of your solemn and voluntary profession of faith in the Redeemer, the principles you have embraced and avowed, the privileges you enjoy as Christians, and as Protestant Dissenters; and your consequent obligations to an holy and exemplary practice.—And we earnestly recommend to you an attentive perusal of that letter again, as what in our opinion, contains ideas of the greatest importance, both as to religious sentiments and practice. Though we would have it always remembered, that 'tis the written word of God alone that is in religion the unerring rule of faith and practice; nor would we wish you to regard any thing we write or say any farther than you believe it to agree with divine revelation. Perhaps you seldom see on your Tables, at Mealtime, any sort of Food, but what you have seen there before; and yet this neither lessens your pleasure at the sight of it, nor your nourishment from it after you have partook of it. If it is such kind of food as the God of Providence hath appointed and made proper for administering nourishment to Man, and you come to your tables with hungry appetites, tho' you may have made many a meal on the same kind of food, yet you again sit down to eat with renewed delight and benefit. So, though our letters have no new matter or motives in them, yet if they contain what the God of



of grace hath provided for the food of the soul ; and you come to sit down to read them with hungrings after the bread of life, perhaps the repast may be as pleasing and nourishing as if some new dish could be set before you. The old saying is " Hunger is the best sauce," for to the hungry man every bitter thing is sweet. While you read this letter, or any other writing, or are hearing any discourse, endeavour to imitate the celebrated Mrs. Row, who said once, when going to hear a preacher whose sentiments did not exactly accord with her own, " I will now endeavour to do as the fowls at the barn door ; pick up the corn and leave the straw." A wise resolution !—Some persons, when hearing sermons, or reading books, pick up the straw, and leave the corn ; but such persons, spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.

Persons, before they sit down to eat, except it be at the table of an Athiest, crave a divine blessing on their food ; so before you read this, or any other writing on religious subjects, you should ask a divine blessing on it, that you may afresh relish old scripture truths, and find them to be the joy and rejoicing of your hearts.

A salvation suitable, adequate, and endless ; as contrived, carried on, and compleated, by the sovereign, boundless, and inexhaustible grace of God in Christ, for the chief of sinners, is uncloying food to hungry starving souls ; and they who hunger and thirst for it shall be filled. This is food which is fit for immediate use, and free to every coming guest. Come, for all things are now ready. It was a saying of the late excellent Mr. Hervey, " Let no day pass without writing a line, and let no line be written without saying something of Christ."

A sermon, without Christ, to a distressed sinner ; is like an empty table, to an hungry man : disappointing, and provoking. And on the other hand, a sermon, full of Christ, to a self-righteous Pharisee ; is like a well-spread table, to a sick man, who becomes the sicker for the sight and smell of the food.

Dear Saviour let thy beauties be,

My soul's eternal food,

And grace command my heart away,

From all created good.

It is of the utmost importance to us, that our chief end or design, in whatever we do, should be good: for nothing can yield us any pleasure in reflection, but what is undertaken with a good intention.—A good man, when dying, once said, “I repent of all my time, except what I have spent in honouring God, and doing good.”—And lately, a trembling sinner, a little before his death, when an attendant offered to adjust his pillow, exclaimed, “Mine is a thorny pillow!” And, if we would not fill our dying pillows with thorns; we should each one of us often say to himself, “Am I now pursuing the chief end of man?” Which, as all confess, is, “To glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.”

To glorify God, as divines say, is to exercise and express a sense of his excellencies. And to enjoy God, is to know that God is ours, and to hold communion with him.

God possesses infinite excellencies, which appear in his word and works.—All God's works praise him, but in the salvation of sinners by Christ, he discovers his greatest glories, as Dr. Watts says, God in the Person of his Son, has all his mightiest works outdone.

'Tis man's business to exercise in himself a sense of these divine excellencies, and to return such emotions of mind toward God, as are suitable to the discoveries he makes of himself. And as man should take notice of God himself, so he should endeavour, relying on divine assistance, to show God to others; that they also might know and worship him.

To enjoy God is, as above, to know that God is ours, is that all his perfection, are engaged to make us blest, and to have communion with him. God in Covenant, in Christ, gives himself to his people to be their God, Heb. viii. 10; and they are such, who are enabled to give themselves to God, and chuse him as their chief good, Ps. cx. 3. Prov. viii. 17. Lam. iii. 24.—To commune with God, perhaps, is, to receive discoveries, impressions, and gracious communications from God; and to contemplate, love, praise, submit to, obey, trust, &c. through a Mediator as revealed in his word.

As sinners we have forfeited God's favor, and are exposed to all the awful effects of his displeasure, and as sinful or depraved, we are averse to God, and inclined to act contrary to him.

Sin



Sin is a violation of God's law, which is holy, just, and good. 'Tis also an opposition to the best of Beings and our best friend.—And 'tis a devoting our powers, which God gave us, to the vilest purposes; entirely contrary to the end, for which we received them. The *work* of sin, as well as the *wages* of it, is death, i. e. the absence of pleasure, and the presence of pain or misery.

As sinners we are haters of God, Rom. i. 30. Hatred is supposed to be made up of disesteem and ill-will; and a sinner as such disesteems God, and bears ill-will towards him. He does not so much as like to think of God, Ps. x. 4. and this hatred of God would in its tendency for ever keep the soul from God; for hatred separates objects, whereas love attracts them.—And this aversion to God, unfits us for his service and worship, and prompts us to any thing rather than to draw nigh to him.

The word of God alone informs us how our great and endless misery, which we deserve; is prevented, (viz) by Christ's dying for our sins and so redeeming us from the curse of the law, and delivering us from wrath to come. And the divine word also informs us how the sinful propensities of our nature are checked, and how contrary propensities are produced within us, (viz.) by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit, in and upon our minds, called, convincing us of sin, and helping us to mortify it; by showing us the things of Christ, and enabling us to believe in him, Gal v. 22. and by leading us into all necessary truth, so as thereby to transform us into the divine image, and so making us meet for heaven, John xvi. 13—2 Cor. iii. 18.

Study then, the precious bible where alone sinful man can learn how he may hope to be happy for ever. The holiness of the contents of the bible; the predictions of contingent events, the miracles which its inspired authors wrought; and its holy effects on the human mind; are among the proofs of its being a Revelation from Heaven. And as God hath given his word to the world, 'tis every persons high duty to receive it with gratitude, and to endeavour to find out the Lord's meaning in it. And it is opposing God, and doing men a great injury, to keep the bible from common use.—And men on discovering what appears to them from the bible to be the mind of God, as to doctrines, or duties; should believe, and practice accordingly, or else they offend him;

for whatever is not of faith is sin, and they also otherwise, must be hypocrites in religion. Nor has any one man a right to impose his creed, as a standard for another's religious sentiments or practice.

Two things, among others, seem to have been designed by the inspired writers in the bible, (viz.) keeping men from sin, and keeping penitent sinners from despair. Ps. lxxxv. 8. John viii. 11. 1 John ii. 1, and these two things, the Ministers of the word, should also aim at. The conformity of our powers, in their operations, to the revealed will of God, is both man's duty, and happiness.—And to hope in God's mercy, as it is exercised in Christ towards lost sinners, is both pleasing to God, and is the best antidote against despair.—Sinning is against God's law, and despairing is against his gospel. Christ is a Saviour both from sin, and from hell; for, such virtues from his sufferings flow, at once to cleanse and pardon too.—The death of Christ is the greatest proof both, that the evil of sin is exceeding great, and that the mercy of God is also exceeding great. Let us therefore often sit down in contemplation under the cross of Christ, and there get out of love with sin, and lose the fear of hell.

Looking to Christ is considered in scripture as a most necessary and important part of religion, and as such, we earnestly recommend it to your study and practice. And may you learn from the word and Spirit of Christ, what it means; and be enabled to attend to it, while running the race which is set before you.—Meditation, as an act of devotion, is supposed to be a designed and fixed employment of the thoughts, on some religious subject, in order to improve the mind, and raise it to God.—And when Christ is designedly the subject of meditation, as he is described in the word, much of what is meant by looking to Christ, is then done. And experience proves, that it is usually while a person is conscientiously engaged in this exercise, that the Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ and shows them to the soul, to its refreshing improvement. There is no object so suitable, relieving, and satisfying, to a distressed sinner, as the Lord Jesus Christ, when he is viewed by faith, as held forth in the divine word. The holy scriptures abundantly testify of Christ as an object of adoration, a source of salvation, and an example of imitation. And the Lord Jesus Christ invites perishing sinners, from all

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the ends of the earth, to look to him the antitype of the brazen serpent, as the only way of having health and cure. And it is just matter of lamentation, that this exercise, so universally and infinitely interesting, is so seldom, and so superficially attended to by us.

This act of looking to Christ is beautifully represented by that excellent clergyman of the church of England, Mr. Hervey, in his meditations; and with which, as what has been often made useful, we shall enrich our present Letter.

“ In every enjoyment, O thou watchful christian, look unto Jesus; receive it as proceeding from his love, and purchased by his agonies.—In every tribulation look unto Jesus; mark his gracious hand, managing the scourge, or mingling the bitter cup; attempering it to a proper degree of severity; adjusting the time of its continuance; and ready to make these seeming disasters productive of real good.—In every infirmity and failing, look unto Jesus, thy merciful High Priest; pleading his atoning blood, and making intercession for transgressors.—In every prayer look unto Jesus, thy prevailing advocate; recommending thy devotions, and “ bearing the iniquity of thy holy things.”—In every temptation look unto Jesus, the author of thy strength and captain of thy salvation; who alone is able to lift up the hands which hang down, to invigorate the enfeebled knees, and make thee more than conqueror over all thy enemies—But especially when the hour of thy departure approaches; when “ thy flesh and thy heart fail;” when all the springs of life are irreparably breaking; then look unto Jesus with a believing eye. Like expiring Stephen, behold him standing at the right hand of God, on purpose to succour his people, in this their last extremity. Yes my christian friend, when thy journey through life is finished and thou art arrived on the very verge of mortality; when thou art just launching out into the invisible world, and all before thee is vast eternity. Then, O then, be sure to look steadfastly unto Jesus, “ see by faith the Lord’s Christ.” View Him as the only way to the everlasting mansions; as the only door to the abodes of bliss.”

As British subjects, and members of the community, we think it our duty, and feel it to be our inclination, to ob-  
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serve in ourselves, and to recommend to others, unfeigned loyalty to the King, and a firm attachment to the British Constitution.

Religion, which is supposed to be, "such a sense of God upon the mind, as excites a supreme care to please him." always excites in the subject of it a concomitant care to discharge the duties due to fellow men, to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, as well as render to God the things that are God's. Religious persons, therefore, will be some of the best members of civil society.

When nations are at war, and the host goeth forth against the enemy, it should then be the special endeavour of those who remain at home, to keep themselves from every wicked thing. Deut. xxiii. 9.—Afflictive Providences call us to a reformation of manner. *Natural* evil should keep us from *moral* evil. and the evil *effects* of sin should keep us from the evil *act* of sin.

In these times, of extraordinary expence, it particularly becomes the professors of religion to look well to their temporal affairs; lest they disgrace their profession, and reduce themselves to a state of poverty; for poverty is a temptation to dishonesty, Prov. xxx. 9.—Diligence and frugality, in this matter, are of great importance.—Without diligence, frugality can have but little about which to act; and without frugality, diligence will be in vain; but operating together, they will produce very beneficial effects. Of an untoward animal, belonging to a very useful species, this complaint has sometimes been made, "She gives a good pail of milk but afterwards kicks it down." Diligence, like such a useful animal, fills the pail; but extravagance, like an untoward one, kicks it down.

For a more extensive representation of the duties we owe to God, to ourselves and to our fellow creatures; we refer you, first to the Bible, and then to our former letters, especially that of the last year.—Some of the letters you have received on those occasions, were written by our dear departed Brethren, whose lips and hands are now mouldered to dust; but by your looking over again the letters they wrote, they will, though dead, yet speak again to you.—And the recollection that we shall no more see the faces of  
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our departed friends upon earth, has sometimes a tendency to increase our regard for their last letters, and dying advice. For our blessings brighten as they take their flight.

Some of us have drawn up the annual letters to the Churches, more than thirty years ago; but our number is small; and the number of those, whom we then addressed, is now very small in the Churches. Death hath sealed up the hands of most of the writers, and closed the eyes of most of the first readers of these letters; as well as emptied the pulpits, and pews, in most of our places of worship.—The writer and readers of this letter will probably soon close their correspondence in this world. May a better correspondence be opened between them in a better world!—May our next meeting be either in heaven or somewhat nearer to it. So pray your affectionate Brethren, in the bonds of the gospel.

Signed by Order of the Association,

JOHN RYLAND.

BREVIATES.

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## B R E V I A T E S.

Many of the Ministers having reached *Salisbury* on Tuesday evening. May 29, a meeting was held at the Independent Meeting-House, where Brother *Flint* prayed, and Brother *Taylor* of *Calne* preached from Heb. xiii. 25. "Grace be with you all." Brother *Sharp* closed in prayer.

Wednesday III. Brother *Ward*, who is soon to be ordained Pastor of the Church at *Melksham*, began in prayer; after which the Preliminaries were read, which had been revised at the desire of the Association, who approved of the slight alterations that had been made in them, and ordered them to be printed, at the end of this year's Letter. Brother *Ryland* being chosen Moderator, the Letters from the Churches were read, and Minutes taken of their contents; Brother *Price* of *Yeovil* closed the service.

VII. The Rev. Mr. *Kingsbury*, Pastor of the Independent Church at *Southampton*, being present, (as were several others of our Pædo-Baptist Brethren,) he began the service in prayer, and Brother *Porter*, of *Bath*, preached from Isa. iv. 5. "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon all her Assemblies a cloud, and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence." Brother *Stradling*, of *Lymington*, concluded.

Thursday VI. Met for prayer; the following Brethren engaged, Brother *Holmes*, of *Devizes*; Brother *Rowcliff*, of *Southampton*; Brother *Cox*, of *Horsington*, and Brother *Mursal*, of *Lymington*. We then received the money for the Association fund, and distributed it; partly for the support of aged and infirm Ministers, and chiefly to encourage village preaching.

X. Brother *Cherry* prayed, Brother *Ryland* preached from Mat. iv. "On these two Commandments hang all the Law, and the Prophets." Brother *Kingdon* then read the Letter, and closed the service in prayer.

III. Brother *Horsley*, of *Portsmouth*, prayed, Brother *Francis*, preached, from Prov. iv. 7. "Wisdom is the principal thing." After he had prayed, and dismissed the Congregation, the Members of the Association stopped for business. Voted the printing of the Letter, which the Moderator was desired



desired to sign on the behalf of the Association : and ordered the Preliminaries, as now corrected, to be added at the end of the Letter.

- Resolved to hold the next Association at the Meeting in the *Pitney, Bristol*, on the Wednesday and Thursday in Whitfunweek. Brother *Kingdon* and Brother *Birt* to preach, in case of failure Brother *Saffery* and Brother *Redding*. Brother *Steadman* to draw up next year's Letter.

Resolved to recommend the case of our poor Brethren at *Kingstanley*, whose very old Meeting-House had become quite dangerous, and who are unable to defray the expence of their new Building without the kind assistance of their friends.

Determined also to recommend earnest prayer on account of the State of the Nation, that we may be kept from the devouring sword ourselves, and that all contending nations may be disposed to an equitable peace. As the first Monday in every month is peculiarly appropriated to prayer for the Church, and the propagation of the Gospel, at home, and abroad ; we advise our Brethren, wherever it may not be found inconvenient through local obstacles, to observe the third Monday in each month as a time for united prayer, for the preservation of our civil and religious privileges, and a blessing on our King and Country.

The business of the Association being ended, the Moderator closed in prayer.

VII. *Ev.* Brother *Steadman*, who is on the point of removing to *Plymouth-Dock*, to be Co-Pastor with Brother *Birt*, prayed, and Brother *Sharp*, of *Bristol*, preached from *Malachi iii. 10—12.* "Prove me now saith the Lord of Hosts, &c." Brother *Ryland* prayed at the close.

#### *State of the Churches since last Association.*

Received	By Baptism	197
	By Letter	21
	Restored	21
Added		220
Removed	By Death	56
	Dismission	22
	Exclusion	21
Diminished		99
Clear Increase		121

*Copy of the* PRELIMINARIES, *annually read, at the*  
*Meeting of the Western Association of BAPTIST*  
 CHURCHES.

1. **T**HAT the Members of this Association, agreeing with all true Protestants, in acknowledging the word of God, contained in the scriptures of the old and new testament, as the only rule of faith and practice; and renouncing all human authority, in our religious concerns; do, nevertheless, voluntarily unite together, as persons who understand the sacred oracles in nearly the same sense, and who agree in opinion with one another, not only concerning the ordinance of Baptism, but also respecting the doctrines of Salvation by grace through a Redeemer, and other truths presupposed therein, or consequent upon it; which we believe to be judiciously and scripturally stated, in the confession of faith, put forth by the Elders and Brethren of our denomination, who met, in the city of London, in the year 1689; and we expect that every associating church do in their letter, every year, express their approbation of the same.

2. That we disclaim all manner of superiority or superintendency over the churches, and acknowledge that we have no authority or power to prescribe or impose any thing upon the faith or practice of any of the churches of Christ. Our whole intention is to be helpers together of one another, by way of counsel and advice, in the right understanding of that perfect rule which our Lord Jesus Christ, the only and best hope of our souls, hath already prescribed and given in his word.

3. We propose therefore, at our annual assemblies, to manifest our brotherly love, by uniting in solemn worship, and fervent prayer for each other in particular, as well as for the church of Christ at large; and to communicate to each other the knowledge of our spiritual state, that we may sympathize with one another, and if occasion require, lend each other assistance in any difficulty, that may arise in the respective churches thus associated.

4. It



4. It is expected that every church should send a letter to the Association at their yearly Meeting; and if convenient a Messenger or Messengers, who shall be named in the letter, as deputed from the church to which they belong; nor shall any person be permitted to vote in our assemblies who is not thus recommended, nor even to speak or give his opinion on any question, unless by general consent.

5. That to prevent all interruption and discord in debates, every person shall stand up when he speaks, directing his speech to the Moderator, (who shall have been first chosen by the Assembly,) and no other person shall speak till the former has sat down.

6. That no question, proposed by any church, shall be considered in this Assembly, unless it is manifest to be a case in that church.

7. That if any particular offence should arise between one church and another, or any particular person and another, no such offence shall be admitted to be debated among us, till the rule Christ has given us in that matter shall have been first observed, and both parties shall unite in asking the opinion of the Assembly on the subject.

8. It is agreed, that no letter shall be received from private persons, without the unanimous consent of the Association.

9. That whatsoever is determined by us in any case, shall not be binding on any one church, unless the consent of that church was first given to leave the affair to our determination.

10. That all things we offer by way of counsel and advice, shall be proved out of the word of God, and have the scriptures annexed.

11. That the Breviates of the Association shall be annexed to the circular Letter, and sent to all the churches.

12. Whereas it has been the constant practice of the Baptist Churches, to receive members from other churches of the same profession, by letters of recommendation, or what is equivalent thereto; we judge the observance of this rule to be beautiful and agreeable to gospel order, and engage to act towards each other answerable to this method.

13. That these Preliminaries be read at every Association, and that all the churches have copies of them, to which they may refer upon occasion.

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